

The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

EDITED BY LORNE PIERCE

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IMPERIAL ORDER DAUGHTERS OF THE EMPIRE AND THE
PROVINCIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

SIR SANDFORD FLEMING

By

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"On The Old Athabasca Trail," etc.*

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The Ryerson Canadian History Readers

Lorne Pierce, *Editor*

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SIR SANDFORD FLEMING

SANDFORD FLEMING was born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, on January 7th, 1827. He was educated at the Kirkcaldy Burgh School, of which Carlyle had been master some twenty years or so before. Here in the Lang Toun, straggling, picturesque in its way, filled with a shrewd, hard-headed, and hard-working population, Sandford Fleming spent his boyhood days. It nurtured in him that rare combination of gifts, the genius for dreaming great dreams and the capacity for making them realities. Here were planted in his mind the germs of mighty projects, destined to be developed in the course of time under other and distant skies.

Fleming developed early those qualities of thoroughness and stickativeness that were to become marked features of his character. He began about this time to keep a diary. Most boys do that, but in the vast majority of cases the diary enjoys but a very short life. Fleming's diary was carried on year after year throughout his long life.

In the very first of these diaries one finds

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written in a boyish hand this extract from *Poor Richard's Almanack*: "But dost thou love life? Then do not squander time for that is the stuff life is made of. How much more than is necessary do we spend in sleep, forgetting that the sleeping fox catches no poultry, and that there will be sleeping enough in the grave. Sloth maketh all things difficult but industry all easy; and he that riseth late must trot all day and shall scarcely overtake his business at night; while laziness travels so slow that poverty soon overtakes him." Not to squander time was one of the guiding principles of Sandford Fleming's life. It made that life a full one in the broadest and best sense of the term.

On his eighteenth birthday an entry in the diary makes it clear that the young man's thoughts were turning toward Canada. By dint of hard work he had qualified himself as a civil engineer and surveyor, and as this was about the beginning of the era of railway construction there was plenty of work for him in the Old Land, but, like many another youngster, the spirit of adventure had got hold of him, and he was determined to try his fortune in the new world.

In April, 1845, he left Kirkcaldy for Glas-

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SANDFORD FLEMING AS A YOUNG MAN AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-THREE. HE WAS THE CHIEF ENGINEER OF THE NORTHERN RAILWAY. IN TWENTY SHORT YEARS HE WAS DESTINED TO WIN UNDYING FAME AS ONE OF THE MASTER BUILDERS OF THE DOMINION.

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gow and took passage in a sailing ship to Quebec. At that time a voyage across the Atlantic was not such a simple matter as it is to-day. Sandford Fleming, who was to do so much to increase and improve the means of communication, had to be satisfied with the leisurely speed of an old-fashioned sailing vessel.

It was a fine spring day, the sun high in the heavens, and the young exile, though his heart was full, could enjoy the ever-changing scenery as they glided down the Clyde. The towers and spires of Glasgow gradually disappeared in the distance; presently the traveller passed Dumbarton Castle; the vessel, piloted through such a mass of shipping as filled him with amazement, dropped down to Greenock, where a new pilot was taken on for the Firth of Clyde. "Night comes on before we reach the Irish sea," says the diary, "and we go to sleep for the first time on the deep."

The voyage was comparatively uneventful, and on May 22nd, four weeks after they left Glasgow, the ship was within sight of America. "I had just gone on deck," says Fleming, "when I was greatly surprised to see hills on the horizon; they had been hid

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before by the mist. Every one crowded on deck, some nearly dancing for joy. It was the first I had seen of the new world, the first glimpse of my adopted country."

From Quebec Fleming took a river steamer to Montreal, and from there travelled by another boat up the Ottawa river to Bytown, by way of the Rideau Canal to Kingston, and thence up Lake Ontario to Cobourg. His destination was Peterboro, which he reached by means of a wagon over a rough corduroy road.

Although he made many congenial friends in this picturesque little town, opportunities for work were of course much greater in Toronto, and before the end of August he was settled in the Provincial capital. Fleming was anxious to obtain employment in his own profession, but at that particular time very few public works were in progress, and for some years he had to be content with any work that came to his hand.

He was never idle, however, and in 1849 went down to Montreal to obtain his commission as a provincial land surveyor. While in Montreal he witnessed the burning of the Parliament Buildings by the mob, and he and two or three other men were instru-

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mental in saving the picture of Queen Victoria which hung over the throne and may be seen to-day in the stately Parliament House in Ottawa.

On his return from Montreal he began the practice of his profession, and soon afterward he with several other surveyors, engineers and architects, organized the Canadian Institute, which became the Royal Canadian Institute in 1914, and has been one of the most active agencies in promoting the intellectual and scientific interests of Canada.

In 1853 Fleming began his association with Canadian railways which was to fill so large a part of his life. At that time he joined the staff of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railroad, afterward known as the Northern Railway. He remained for ten years with this company, first as assistant engineer and later as chief engineer. Though comparatively uneventful these were vitally important years to the young engineer. He was passing through the formative period of a man's life, and as the imaginative side found expression in the creation of the Canadian Institute, the practical engineer threw himself heart and soul into the novel prob-

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lems of a pioneer railway, gaining thereby experience and breadth of vision for the infinitely larger engineering problems that awaited him in the future.

Soon after his settlement in Canada, Fleming began to interest himself in the great question of transportation. He was one of the early advocates of the policy of building a railway across British North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and as a preliminary measure suggested the creation of a road from the west end of Lake Superior to the Red River Colony.

In 1863 he was asked, on behalf of the people of the Red River Colony, to present to the Canadian and Imperial Governments a memorial asking for the establishment of means of communication between the eastern provinces and British Columbia by way of the Great Lakes, the Red River country and the Saskatchewan. The idea was that a road might be built from Lake Superior to the Red River, which would afterward be expanded into either a rail and water route or a through railway from ocean to ocean.

This transcontinental railway scheme was one that had already engaged the attention of several far-sighted men, men of big ideas,

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men who like Fleming possessed that rare combination of common sense and imagination that has been the driving force behind all great public enterprises. The average man could find in such a project, at such a time, nothing short of madness; and the enthusiast who urged it was branded as a crank.

Because Fleming was a man of big ideas, with a firm faith in the destiny of his country, he threw himself whole-heartedly into the project that meant so much to the people of the Red River Settlement. He urged it with all his strength upon the then Canadian Government, and then sailed for England to lay the scheme before the Imperial Government. Fleming's mission bore no direct fruit, but there can be no doubt that the seed was planted which some years afterward was to grow into Canada's first transcontinental railway.

In 1863 the Governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and what was then known as Canada (the present Provinces of Ontario and Quebec) had decided to carry out surveys in connection with the proposed Intercolonial Railway between Quebec and Halifax. The surveys were to be entrusted

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to a Commission of three engineers, one appointed by Canada, the second by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and the third by the Imperial Government. It is a tribute to Fleming's growing fame as an engineer, that all these governments nominated the same man and the proposed Commission narrowed down to Sandford Fleming.

This important railway project, with which Fleming was to be associated for some years to come, and whose successful completion was to be mainly due to his ability, energy and determined character, had been under consideration for many years. It is not easy to realize to-day, when one can board a comfortable train at Montreal one afternoon and be in Saint John, New Brunswick, the following morning, that sixty years ago a traveller must either take a slow and roundabout route by sea, or an equally roundabout route by land, most of it through foreign territory. Indeed it occupied as much time then to go from Montreal to Halifax as it does to-day to go from Montreal to England.

In estimating the value of Sandford Fleming's services in carrying the Intercolonial through to completion, one must remember

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what a very important factor that railway was in binding together the then scattered Maritime Provinces and Upper and Lower Canada.

In 1864 there were no roads and no means of communication along the route that was to be surveyed for the Intercolonial. Fleming and his men left Quebec in midwinter and made their way to Rivière du Loup. From thence their surveys had to be made through a region of dense forest. They travelled on snow-shoes and carried their supplies on dog-sleds. Reading between the lines of his diary, jotted down hastily at the end of a hard day's travel, one gets a faint idea of the hardships he had to endure. Some thrifty official at Quebec had provisioned the surveys with canned meat left over from the Crimean War. Many a time the surveyors must have wished that it had been providentially sunk in the Black Sea. Fortunately the country sometimes afforded fish and small game, with an occasional moose to break the monotony of the unpalatable rations of the army contractors.

Finally they reached the little town of Dalhousie, where the night was spent with David Saddler, a surveyor. Saddler had

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been through the terrible Miramichi fire of 1825, and could still recall the days of horror when whole districts were swept clean of every living thing. For him, however, the fire had not been wholly disastrous. Fortune had enabled him to save from drowning a beautiful young woman, who, with others of her family had fled to the river as a last refuge. In good time she became his wife, and took her place at his own fireside.

From Dalhousie Fleming drove to Bathurst and Newcastle, and then to Fredericton, the capital of New Brunswick. There he was invited by the Governor to dine at Government House. He declined, as he had nothing to wear but his grey homespun suit and red flannel shirt. The Governor, however, insisted that he should come just as he was. "You can imagine," says Fleming, "the sensation I made when I entered the drawing room at Government House, filled with ladies in wonderful toilettes and officers in full dress uniform. However, I was given a charming companion to take in to dinner and enjoyed myself immensely."

Fleming describes a curious incident in connection with one of his survey parties. While at Fredericton he had a visit one morn-

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ing from a young man who introduced himself as Lord Haddo, and asked to be allowed to join one of the survey parties. Fleming said that it would be impossible to take a traveller or sportsman with the party. "But," said Haddo, "you misunderstand me. I am looking for work, not for game. I want to join your survey, and I can serve as an axeman as well as any other fellow."

Fleming had to return to Quebec, and some time afterward found himself in Halifax, where he was surprised to see Lord Haddo on the dock embarking for Liverpool. He explained that he had just had word of the death of his father, the Earl of Aberdeen, and must return at once to Scotland. "He was," says Fleming, "a man of strong and original views, anxious to feel that he could make his own way in the world apart from the accident of birth, and anxious also to gain first-hand knowledge of the conditions that other men had to face in the new world."

About a year later the young nobleman came out to New Brunswick again, and from there made his way to Gloucester, where he joined the crew of a whaling ship bound for the South Seas. From the day he sailed out of Gloucester Harbour nothing was ever

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heard of him or of the ship and crew. The Earl of Aberdeen, who some years ago was Governor-General of Canada, was a younger brother of the man who went down in the Gloucester whaler.

Fleming, having completed the surveys for the Intercolonial, was then entrusted with the very important work of building the railway. It was a long, involved and difficult problem, but it was finally carried to a successful completion. In his final report as Chief Engineer Fleming says, "On this day, July 1st, 1876, may be chronicled the completion of the Intercolonial Railway, and the full consummation of the union of the British Provinces in North America." No one but Fleming himself could ever know the whole inner history of the Intercolonial, or how much of his own unconquerable personality went into the work and made possible its successful conclusion. But it is certainly true that the Dominion owes much to this eminent engineer.

While Fleming was still engaged in building the Intercolonial he was offered by the Canadian Government, in 1871, the position of Engineer-in-Chief of the proposed Canadian Pacific Railway. He hesitated to

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accept the office, feeling, quite naturally, that the responsibilities of the Intercolonial were enough for one man to assume, but he finally consented when the Government put it to him as a matter of public duty.

The situation was extraordinary. The Canadian Pacific Railway, a gigantic undertaking viewed even from the standpoint of to-day, was, in 1871, a project without a parallel in the development of means of transportation. When one places oneself in the Canada of 1871, with its handful of people and its undeveloped resources, it is impossible not to admire the splendid courage of the public men who launched our first transcontinental railway. With such a task to be carried through, it is not to be wondered at that the Government of the day turned to the one Canadian engineer who was big enough to handle such a tremendous problem.

From 1871 to 1880 Sandford Fleming was engaged in directing a series of careful surveys for the line of the Canadian Pacific, and to some extent in building the road. For five years he filled at the same time the positions of Chief Engineer of the Intercolonial and of the Canadian Pacific, and for part of

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that time he was also Chief Engineer of the Newfoundland Railway. No man, without his extraordinary mental and physical vigour, could have borne the tremendous strain.

The task was herculean. The building of the Intercolonial was itself a work of sufficient magnitude, and it must be remembered that this man put into everything that he undertook a conscientious care that extended to every detail. Yet at the same time he was planning and personally supervising a railway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the first transcontinental road in North America, and at that time by all odds the most formidable railway project in the world. The work involved surveys through the extremely difficult country north of Lake Superior, among the snow-covered peaks of the Rocky Mountains, and through that veritable sea of mountains that makes up so much of the great Province of British Columbia.

The Canadian Pacific Railway during the period that Fleming was associated with it was a national project. To all intents and purposes it was an extension of the Intercolonial to the Pacific; to link the newly created provinces of Manitoba and British

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Columbia to the rest of the Dominion; to create a channel of communication between the east and the west; to open up for settlement the vast fertile plains between Lake Superior and the Rockies. To the Empire it would become a very important link in the chain of communication between the mother country and her far-flung dependencies.

The project appealed to Fleming as a great engineering problem; but even more so as a matter of national and imperial significance. He was then, as always, what might be called a practical Imperialist. He dreamed dreams and formulated projects that were sometimes in advance of his time, but his dreams were never impractical. They looked always to the knitting together of the scattered members of a world-wide empire by creating and improving means of communication; and they had behind them the belief that every advance in the means of communication must inevitably make for better understanding, closer fellowship, and the only lasting form of union among the different branches of the British Empire.

The tremendous difficulties that had to be overcome in building the Canadian Pacific Railway, and even in surveying the route it

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was to follow, may be realized from the fact that over large portions of the way the surveyors were the first white men to travel. It took a long time to decide how the railway should be carried through the Rockies. There were many passes, and each of them had to be carefully surveyed to find which would be most favourable for the purposes of the railway. Fleming's final conclusion was that the Yellowhead Pass offered the best possible route, because of the fact that the line could be carried through it without any heavy grades. For political or other reasons his recommendations were not accepted, and the Canadian Pacific was finally built through the Kicking Horse Pass, which involved very much steeper grades than the Yellowhead, and added enormously to the cost, both of construction and operation. Fleming's judgment was justified many years afterward when both the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern were carried through the Yellowhead Pass into British Columbia.

In 1872 Fleming, having carefully examined the reports of his engineers, thought it wise to study with his own eyes the main features of the route that had then

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been selected for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The story of this important journey was afterwards told by George Munro Grant, his companion on the trip, in a book entitled *Ocean to Ocean*.

From Prince Arthur's Landing on Lake Superior, now known as Port Arthur, the party followed the Dawson Route, by wagon and canoe, to Fort Garry, now Winnipeg. Here saddle-horses were procured, with Red River carts for the baggage, and they set out over the great plains for the mountains, travelling by way of Fort Ellice, Fort Carlton and Fort Edmonton, posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. On the way they met or passed numbers of hunting or trading parties, traders going west and half-breeds returning east with carts well laden with buffalo skins and dried meat.

"A number of Red River people club together in the spring and go west to hunt the buffalo. Their caravan is popularly called a 'brigade' and very picturesque is its appearance on the road or around the camp-fire. The old men, the women, and little children are engaged on the expedition, and all help. The men ride and the women drive the carts. The children make the fires and do chores. The men shoot buffalo; the women dry the meat and make it into pemmican."

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From Edmonton the route lay over the Rocky Mountains by way of Yellowhead Pass. Fresh saddle-horses were obtained from the Hudson's Bay Company, and the carts were abandoned for pack-horses accustomed to the peculiarities of mountain trails.

At one of the camps, on the banks of the Athabasca, a curious relic of early days came to light.

"While hacking with his axe at the brush on the camping-ground, just where our heads would lie, Brown struck something metallic that blunted the edge of the axe. Feeling with his hand he drew out from near the root of a young spruce tree an ancient sword bayonet, the brazen hilt and steel blade in excellent preservation, but the leather scabbard half eaten as if by the teeth of some animal. It seemed strange in this vast and silent forest wilderness thus to come upon a relic that told, probably, of the old days when the two rival fur companies armed their agents to the teeth, and when bloody contests often took place between them."

The old sword in its rotting scabbard hung for years on the walls of Fleming's home in Ottawa, among other mementoes of the far west.

Making their way into the mountains and up to the extraordinarily low summit of

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Yellowhead Pass, Fleming and his companions entered British Columbia, and after a rather strenuous journey down the valley of the North Thompson River arrived at Kamloops about the end of September. Here they encountered one of the characteristic supply-trains on its way up to Tête Jaune Cache—fifty-two mules led by a bell-horse and driven by four or five men representing as many different nationalities.

From Kamloops Fleming had a comparatively easy journey down to Lytton, at the junction of the Thompson and the Fraser, thence to Yale by the famous road, hewn in places out of the face of the rock hundreds of feet above the bed of the river; and from Yale down the river by steamer to New Westminster. A pleasant sail through the Straits of Georgia, with a brief visit to Butc Inlet, brought the travellers to Vancouver Island and the pretty little town of Victoria, something over three months from the day they had left Halifax.

In 1883 Fleming again travelled across the continent, this time crossing the Rockies by way of the Kicking Horse Pass. He describes the journey in his book *Old and New Westminster*. One is struck with the

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change in the means of transportation that had taken place in eleven years. The first journey on horseback occupied thirty-six days, from Fort Garry to the mountains; the second journey by rail was made in fifty-six hours.

A good deal of anxiety was felt at this time as to the possibility of getting the railway through the mountains. The Kicking Horse Pass route had been explored, and it was known that it was practicable, although difficult, as far as the valley of the Columbia. Nothing was yet known, however, as to the next range of mountains, the Selkirks. To Fleming's immense relief he met Major Rogers, who had been exploring in the Selkirks, and learned that a pass had been found by way of the Beaver River and the Illecillewaet. That would bring them to the second crossing of the Columbia, and it was already known that the railway could be built through the Gold Range by way of Eagle Pass.

Without attempting to follow Fleming on his eventful journey through the mountains to the coast, one passage in his book may be quoted, to give some idea of the hard work that was involved in surveying a route for

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the Canadian Pacific Railway. Fleming is speaking of the journey through the Selkirks.

"The walking is dreadful; we climb over and creep under fallen trees of great size, and the men soon show that they feel the weight of their burdens. Their halts for rest are frequent. It is hot work for us all. The dripping rain from the bush and branches saturate us from above. Tall ferns sometimes reaching to the shoulder, and devil's clubs through which we have to crush our way, make us feel as if dragged through a horse-pond, and our perspiration is that of a Turkish bath. We meet with obstacles of every description. The devil's clubs may be numbered by millions, and they are perpetually wounding us with their spikes against which we strike. We halt very frequently for rest. Our advance is varied by ascending rocky slopes and slippery masses, and again descending to a lower level. We wade through alder swamps and tread down skunk cabbage and the prickly aralias, and so we continue until half-past four, when the tired-out men are unable to go farther. A halt becomes necessary. We camp for the night on a high bank overlooking the Illecillewaet. Our advance on a direct line we estimate at four miles!"

Two years later a dramatic incident took place in the history of Canada's first trans-continental railway—the driving of the last

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spike. Fleming was one of the chief actors in this historic episode, and tells the story. There was nothing very romantic in the actual scene—a group of railway men and in their midst three notable Canadians, Donald Smith (afterwards Lord Strathcona), Sandford Fleming and William Van Horne. The surroundings were not at all inspiring; a cutting slashed through the forest and down the centre of it two lines of steel, a desolate array of stumps and a sea of mud, a crowd of uninteresting-looking men, mostly unshaven, and in the foreground an elderly gentleman driving a spike.

But what a story lay behind the driving of that iron spike! The story of a young country inspired by the splendid optimism of youth! The story of an imperial dream and what came of it! A land of magnificent distances and incalculable resources, with a sparse population and very little capital. What madness to assume the burden of a transcontinental railway!

Shrewd onlookers shook their wise heads and warned that the railway would not earn enough to pay for its axle-grease!

This little group standing in the mud at

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Craigellachie, in Eagle Pass, around an iron spike, saw the completion of the transcontinental railway. One part of their dream had come true. The other—the splendid success of the daring experiment—has long since been proved beyond all possible dispute. Not the least important of the actors in this national drama was Sandford Fleming.

So far Fleming has been considered as a man who planned and built great railways. He may now be introduced in another but equally important rôle. Probably none of the great projects associated with Fleming's name more strikingly illustrates his sheer tenacity of purpose—quiet, unostentatious, almost apologetic, but none the less compelling—than the movement for a British, state-owned cable across the Pacific. From 1879, when he first broached the subject, to 1902, when the cable was actually laid from Vancouver Island to New Zealand and Australia, he kept the matter alive not only in Canada but in England and Australasia; kept it alive and moving, though the forces arrayed against him, open and hidden, were enough to have daunted even a man of so strong and untiring a purpose.

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It was, indeed, a long and uphill fight against tremendous odds. Fleming had to overcome first of all the apathy of the people of Canada and the other self-governing colonies; then the inactivity of the British Government; finally the powerful opposition of the group of wealthy cable companies which held a monopoly of the business between England and Australia, and, naturally enough, were loath to part with it. Nevertheless, patience and perseverance won the day, as they generally do when enlisted in a good cause, and backed by brains. The Pacific Cable has been in operation now for many years, and it would be difficult to overestimate its value as a means of bringing closer together the scattered members of the British Empire.

But Sandford Fleming was never contented with a bite while the rest of the apple was in sight. Having secured the Pacific Cable, he immediately started an active agitation for its logical development, a system of submarine cables and land telegraphs circling the globe, touching only British territory, and owned by the Empire. This he called the All-Red Line. Up to the time of his death, Fleming was still pressing this

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important scheme upon the attention of governments and public organizations throughout the Empire. He did not live to see it carried out, nor is it yet an accomplished fact, but progress has been made, and in course of time the British Empire will enjoy the fruits of Sandford Fleming's far-sighted and patriotic dream.

We have grown so used to the system of Standard Time, that is the division of the earth into zones within which all have the same time, that we hardly realize the inconvenience of the old system, or lack of system, that was used a few years ago. In Fleming's day, for instance, no less than five different standards of time were used between Halifax and Toronto. To-day there are only four changes between the Atlantic and the Pacific, and they are at fixed points. Here, again, the people of Canada and other countries have to thank Sandford Fleming for patiently persuading them to drop the old, cumbersome and very inconvenient way of measuring time in favour of a uniform system. It seems incredible that it should have taken years to secure the adoption of this sensible reform, but people are very loath

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to abandon clumsy expedients to which they have grown accustomed.

One may fittingly sum up the life of Sandford Fleming in his own words.

"I have often thought how grateful I am for my birth into this marvellous world, and how anxious I have always been to justify it. I have dreamed my little dreams, I have planned my little plans, and begrudged no effort to bring about what I regarded as desirable results. I have always felt that the humblest among us has it in his power to do something for his country by doing his duty, and that there is no better inheritance to leave his children than the knowledge that he has done so to the utmost of his ability.

"It has been my great good fortune to have had my lot cast in this goodly land, and to have been associated with its educational and material prosperity. Nobody can deprive me of the satisfaction I feel in having had the opportunity and the will to strive for the advancement of Canada and the good of the empire. I am profoundly thankful for length of days, for active, happy years, for friendships formed, and especially for the memory of those dear souls who have enriched my own life while they remained on this side."

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In the last-named book will be found a complete bibliography of the writings of Sir Sandford Fleming, relating to transportation problems, empire cables, standard time, and the many other questions that occupied his attention.

(Continued from inside front cover)

4. STORIES OF HEROES

- *Maisonneuve—*Lorne Pierce*
- *Pierre Le Moyné d'Iberville—*Norman McLeod Rogers*
- *Mascarene—*V. P. Seary*
- *Marquis de Montcalm—*J. C. Sutherland*
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